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SUBJECT: GHANA POLITICAL ROUNDUP

11. SUMMARY: On April 17, former New Patriotic Party (NPP) presidential candidate Alan Kyerematen delivered a resignation letter to his party amidst speculation that he will launch an independent bid for the presidency. Following weeks of intense media speculation, NDC presidential candidate John Atta Mills selected John Dramani Mahama, MP for Bole/Bamboi, as his vice presidential running mate. The selection was widely welcomed, with the exception of some Muslim NDC supporters who were disappointed that Mills did not select a Muslim candidate. The Electoral Commission (EC) admitted to discrepancies in the voter registration list in Ashanti, and urged support for additional local election observers. The newly-established Democratic Freedom Party (DFP) selected a flag bearer, while New Patriotic Party (NPP) parliamentary primaries have been dogged by protests. Tension also mounted at sea, as Ghanaian fishermen protested against the activities of Chinese fishing vessels damaging their nets. Finally, the spiritual head of the world Ahmadiyya Muslim community began a six-day visit to Ghana. END SUMMARY.

Alan Kyerematen Quits NPP

12. On April 18, NPP General Secretary Nana Ohene-Ntow confirmed media reports that Alan Kyerematen, who had hoped to be the NPP presidential nominee, has resigned from the NPP. Kyerematen finished second to Nana Akufo-Addo in the contest to be the party's candidate. A former Trade and Industry Minister, Kyerematen had the strong backing of President Kufour, and there is speculation that he will run as an independent candidate. Ohene-Ntow said the party was "shocked, disappointed and surprised" by Kyerematen's resignation, and confirmed that Kyerematen's resignation letter had complained that his supporters had been "alienated and intimidated" following the NPP's selection of Akufo-Addo as flagbearer in December. (COMMENT: An independent Kyerematen candidacy would have a significant effect on the presidential race, and would undoubtedly pull votes away from Akufo-Addo and damage the NPP's prospects. END COMMENT). Post will report further as more information becomes available.

Mills selects John Mahama as running mate

13. The National Executive Committee (NEC) of the opposition NDC approved unanimously John Dramani Mahama, MP for Bole/Bamboi, as Professor John Evans Atta Mills' running mate for the 2008 election. Mahama is a northerner, a Christian from the country's most Muslim region, a Member of Parliament since 1996, and served as Minister of Communication in the government of former President Rawlings. Mahama is from the Gonja ethnic group, and as such is seen as neutral in northern ethnic conflicts.

14. Prof. Mills is expected to introduce his running mate at a separate function yet to be scheduled. John Mahama beat out several other candidates, including Betty Mould Iddrisu, a lawyer; Mohammed Mumuni, Mill's previous running mate; and Minority Leader Alban Bagbin. Mills had been under pressure from some quarters within the party (including former First Lady Nana Rawlings) to select a woman as running mate.

Rawlings Aide Victor Smith Dismissed

¶15. On April 11 former President Rawlings sacked his Special Aide and Director of Public Affairs since 2001, Emmanuel Victor Smith. Smith, who is a strong supporter of NDC candidate John Atta Mills, was reportedly dismissed due to his 'obscene loyalty' to Mills and is rumored to have provoked the anger of former First Lady Nana Rawlings. Smith has openly supported John Mahama as against Mrs. Rawlings' preferred choice, Betty Mould-Iddrisu.

¶16. Mr. Smith's dismissal was communicated to him through an SMS text message from Mr. Rawlings which read: "Thanks for your services to my Office, Mr. Victor Smith. Draft a press release relieving you as staff of my office to enable you continue your political career hopefully in the office of Prof Mills. Press announcement to be prepared right away. Thanks and God guide you-JJR."

¶17. A statement from the Former President on April 14 only stated that the reason for the removal of his special aide, Mr. Victor Smith, was not "a matter for public consumption". It added that Rawlings would not "be cajoled into offering an explanation because sponsored rumor mongers are at it again churning falsehoods".

Muslim NDC members speak out against John Mahama

¶18. A group calling itself Concerned Muslim Youth in Tamale has spoken out against the selection of John Mahama as the party's vice presidential candidate. The group said the selection of a Christian partner for the Christian presidential candidate was a miscalculation and fundamentally wrong. They pointed out that the support base of the NDC was centered in the predominantly Muslim north, and in Zongo communities.

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¶19. A week earlier, group of youth in Tamale went on a rampage following media speculation that John Mahama would be selected. The group, led by an NDC youth activist in Tamale, Sofo Yusif Azorka, advocated the selection of Alhaji Mohammed Mumuni, who was Mills' running mate in 2004.

¶10. Nevertheless, other Muslim NDC leaders have said that it was important for members of the party to put aside religious difference in the collective interest of the party. (COMMENT: The challenge now facing the NDC is how to manage the possible dissent that may emanate from the selection of the party's vice presidential candidate. END COMMENT).

EC urges more local election observers

¶11. On April 10, the Chairman of Electoral Commission (EC), Kwadwo Afari-Gyan, called attention to the need to increase the capacity of local election observers in anticipation of a smaller number of foreign observers at the 2008 election. According to the EC, the international observers are used less frequently in 'stabilized' democracies. Given Ghana's experience in holding credible elections since 1992, said the EC, few international observers should be expected for the 2008 Election. Nevertheless, Afari-Gyan said local observers were critical to ensuring free, fair and credible elections.

DFP Selects Emmanuel Ansah-Antwi as Flagbearer

¶12. The recently established Democratic Freedom Party (DFP) on April 5 elected Emmanuel Ansah-Antwi, a political unknown, as its flagbearer for the December elections. Ansah-Antwi, a 48-year-old marketing and communication consultant, received 868 votes, representing 81.2 per cent of the total while veteran politician,

businessman and interim National Chairman of the DFP, Alhaji Issaka, received 18.8 per cent of the ballots cast.

¶13. Alhaji Abdul-Rahman Issaka blamed Dr. Obed Asamoah, "Life Patron of the Party," for his defeat. Issak said the election result was evidence of the power and influence Asamoah has in the Party, which was not ideal for its democratic development.

¶14. Ansah-Antwi assured DFP delegates that financing the Party's campaign would not be a problem, and that the DFP would contest all 230 parliamentary seats. This is the first national congress for the DFP since its formation earlier this year. The DFP was formed soon after Asamoah lost his position as chairman of the main opposition National Democratic Congress.

NPP parliamentary nomination dogged by protests

¶15. The ruling NPP began vetting parliamentary aspirants in the Ashanti Region, but the process was disrupted when NPP supporters at Subin, Nshiasu and Offinsu South constituencies staged demonstrations at vetting venues, resulting in a temporary delay in the process.

¶16. NPP supporters in the Subin constituency protested against the candidacy of the Chief Executive of the Ghana Cocoa Board, Isaac Osei. In Offinso South, constituents called for primaries in the constituency, responding to a decision by the NPP not to organize primaries in constituencies where it won the seats through by-elections. Constituents in Offinso South have threatened to vote against the party if the decision is not reversed.

¶17. A group from the NPP's Ayawaso West Wuogon Constituency demonstrated at the NPP's Accra Regional office. The group was opposed to what they believed was an attempt by the regional executive to challenge the nomination of Deputy Manpower Minister, Mrs. Frema Osei Opere, the incumbent MP. [NOTE: Deputy Minister Frema leads GOG efforts to combat child labor in the cocoa sector, and is a key Mission contact. END NOTE].

Ghana's Fishermen protest activities of Chinese vessels

¶18. The local media has reported on a conflict between Ghanaian and Chinese fishermen along Ghana's western coastline. According to the reports, Ghanaian fishermen have complained that their fishing nets and gear are being destroyed by Chinese fishing trawlers. The Chinese trawlers are alleged to use unorthodox means of fishing, such as high voltage mercury bulbs powered by generators, to attract and harvest fish. Ghanaian fishermen also complained that Chinese vessels are illegally engaged in pair trawling. The Ghanaians complained that the Ministry of Fisheries has failed to act in spite

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of the numerous requests for intervention.

Head of Ahmadiyya Muslims arrives in Ghana

¶19. Finally, the Supreme Head of the world Ahmadiyya Muslim community, Hazrat Mirza Masroor Ahmad Khalifatul Masih V, arrived in Ghana April 15 for a six-day visit. The visit is his second to Ghana since becoming the spiritual head of Ahmadiyya Muslims in 2003. During his six-day visit, Hazrat Ahmad is scheduled to participate in activities marking 100 years of Ahmadiyya Mission in Ghana [COMMENT: The Ahmadiyya enjoy positive relations with Muslims and other communities in Ghana, in contrast to countries where they have been subject to discrimination. END COMMENT].